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**CALIFORNIA SHAKESPEARE THEATER COMPLETES
2018 EPIC SUMMER WITH RETURN ENGAGEMENT OF
MARCUS GARDLEY'S HIT *BLACK ODYSSEY***

black odyssey's Opening Day, September 26, Declared "Marcus Gardley Day"

by Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf

Berkeley, CA, September 11 – **California Shakespeare Theater** announced today the cast of the return engagement of its record-breaking hit play *black odyssey*, playing **September 25 through October 7, 2018** at the **Bruns Amphitheater**. The 2017 northern California premiere of *black odyssey* marked the Cal Shakes debut of Oakland native **Marcus Gardley** (*The House That Will Not Stand* at Berkeley Rep), and was the second production ever of the play, which was re-set in Oakland for Cal Shakes. The music-filled journey through African-American folklore garnered box office records, critical acclaim, sold-out houses, and standing ovations during its initial August 2017 run. The production and artistic company garnered a collective sixteen Theater Bay Area Award nominations, including nominations for Outstanding Ensemble, Production, and Direction. Tickets for the return engagement (\$20 - 97, subject to change) are available at calshakes.org or **510.548.9666**.

After he is lost at sea and presumed dead, American soldier Ulysses Lincoln struggles to find his way home to his wife and son. But manipulating his journey are a host of gods: the dignified Deus and the scheming Paw Sidin, playing with Ulysses' fate like a game of chess, and the radiant Aunt Tina, who has her own reasons for setting her sights on the wandering warrior. A fable about confronting the burdens of one's past before you can truly find "home," the return of this lyrical epic will be one of the theatrical events of the season.

"I'm thrilled to bring Marcus' enthralling journey back to the Bruns," says Artistic Director and *black odyssey* director **Eric Ting**. "We're celebrating this homecoming in a few special ways. Marcus was the recipient of our annual Guiding Star award earlier this year, and the City of Oakland surprised him at the

awards ceremony with the proclamation of **Marcus Gardley Day** on the re-opening of the production, **September 26, 2018.**”

In addition to Marcus Gardley Day, Cal Shakes is presenting several other special events. **A Pay What You Can** performance will be held on **Tuesday, September 25**. Tickets will be available starting at 10am on the day of the show through TodayTix and the Cal Shakes Box Office at 510.548.9666. On **Sunday, September 30**, Cal Shakes will host a **Second Line lesson and parade** with *black odyssey* co-choreographer **Latanya D. Tigner** for community partners and audience members in conjunction with the 4pm performance (lesson starts at 3:15pm). Second Line is one of the cornerstones of the New Orleans parade tradition, and is featured in *black odyssey*. The afternoon will feature a live New Orleans-style band playing before and after the show, an opportunity to learn the steps together, and will end that day's performance with a Second Line parade celebrating our community. The event is included in that day's ticket price.

Original cast members returning to the Bruns for the remounted production include **Aldo Billingslea** as Great Grand Paw Sidin (*The War of the Roses*, *Othello* and *Fences*); **Margo Hall** as Great Aunt Tina (*Fences*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Raisin in the Sun*), **Safiya Fredericks** as Benevolence Nausicca Sabine (*Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Hard Problem* at A.C.T., *Aubergine* at Berkeley Rep), **Michael Gene Sullivan** as Artez Sabine (San Francisco Mime Troupe, Berkeley Rep, Marin Theater Company, among many others), and **Michael Curry** as Malachai (*Topdog/Underdog* and *dance of the holy ghosts* at Ubuntu Theater Project). Joining the *black odyssey* cast for the first time are **Velina Brown** as Alesendra Sabine (San Francisco Mime Troupe, American Conservatory Theater, Berkeley Rep, among others); **Santoya Fields** as Nella Pell (*White* at Shotgun, *A Streetcar Named Desire* at African American Shakespeare Company) **JD Mollison** as Ulysses Lincoln (*X: or, Betty Shabazz v. The Nation* at The Acting Company, *Venice* at The Public Theater, *A Civil War Christmas* at New York Theater Workshop, among others); Tony award-winner **Cleavant Derrick** as Great Grand Daddy Deus (Broadway's *Dreamgirls* and television shows *Sliders* and many others); and Oakland-native jazz drummer **Ruthie Price**, who has performed with Van Hunt, Ed Kelly, Etta James, and Marcus Shelby, among many others.

Black odyssey's creative team includes the return of Scenic Designer **Michael Locher** (whose previous designs for Cal Shakes include *Fences*, *Spunk*, and *The Winter's Tale*, Costume Designer **Dede M. Ayite** (who designed the set for Cal Shakes' production of *A Raisin in the Sun* and has also designed for Playwright's Horizons, the Public, and Lincoln Theater Center, among others), Lighting Designer **Xavier Pierce** (whose work has been seen in Cal Shakes' productions of *Everybody*, *The Glass Menagerie*, and *Fences*), and Sound Designer **T. Carlis Roberts** (who has designed for Steppenwolf, Arena Stage, San Jose Rep, and Lookingglass Theatre, among others), and Movement Choreographers **Latanya D. Tigner** (who choreographed *A Winter's Tale* at SF Shakes and *Dance of the Holy Ghost* at Ubuntu Theatre, among others) and **Kendra Kimbrough Barnes** (founder and director of K-STAR-PRODUCTIONS and co-presenter of the Black Choreographers Festival: Here & Now).

Marcus Gardley is a Bay Area-born playwright who the New Yorker calls “the heir to Garcia Lorca, Pirandello and Tennessee Williams.” His most recent play, *X or the Nation v Betty Shabazz* was a New York Times Critic Pick and was presented off-Broadway in early 2018. He is the recipient of the 2015 Glickman Award for *The House That Will Not Stand*. The play was commissioned and produced by Berkeley Rep and had subsequent productions at Yale Rep and the Tricycle Theater in London and was a finalist for the 2015 Kennedy Prize. Gardley was the 2013 USA James Baldwin Fellow and the 2011 PEN Laura Pels award winner for Mid-Career Playwright. His play *The Gospel of Loving Kindness* was produced in March 2015 and won the BTAA award for best play/playwright. His play *Every Tongue Confess*, starring Phylicia Rashad and directed by Kenny Leon, was nominated for the Steinberg New Play Award, the Charles MacArthur Award for Best Play and was the recipient of the Edgerton New Play Award. His musical, *On The Levee*, premiered at Lincoln Center and was nominated for 11 Audelco Awards including outstanding playwright. His critically acclaimed epic *And Jesus Moonwalks the Mississippi* was produced at the Cutting Ball Theater and received the SF Bay Area Theater Critics Circle Award nomination for outstanding new play and had two sold-out extensions. His epic *black odyssey* premiered at the Denver Center Theatre and opened to rave reviews. In 2014, his saga *The Road Weeps, the Well Runs Dry* had a national tour and was a finalist for the 2014 Kennedy Prize. His plays *This World in a Woman’s Hands* (October 2009) and *Love is a Dream House in Lorin* (March 2007) have been hailed as some of the best in Bay Area Theater. The latter was nominated for the National Critics Steinberg New Play Award. He has had six other plays produced including and adaptation of Tartuffe called *A Wolf in Snake Skin Shoes*, which was produced in London, *dance of the holy ghosts* at Center Stage in Baltimore and the Yale Repertory Theatre, *(L)imitations of Life* at the Empty Space in Seattle, WA and *like sun fallin’ in the mouth* at the National Black Theatre Festival. He is the recipient of the 2013 Mellon Playwright Residency, 2011 Aetna New Voice Fellowship at Hartford Stage, the Helen Merrill Award, a Kesselring Honor, a Gerbode Emerging Playwright Award, a National Alliance for Musical Theatre Award, a Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation Grant, a NEA/TCG Playwriting Participant Residency, the Eugene O’Neill Memorial Scholarship and the ASCAP Cole Porter Prize. Gardley holds an MFA in Playwriting from the Yale Drama School and is an alumnus of New Dramatists, The Dramatists Guild, and the Lark Play Development Center. Currently, he is working on a TV show for Showtime.

A Grammy-nominated vocalist, percussionist, producer and workshop leader, **Linda Tillery** (Vocal Composer and Music Director) has performed and recorded with leading musicians across several musical genres, including Santana, Boz Scaggs, Sheila E., Taj Mahal, and Bobby McFerrin. In 1992 formed the Cultural Heritage Choir in order to pursue the research and performance of Sacred and Secular music of enslaved Africans and their descendants.

Molly Holm (Vocal Composer and Vocal Ensemble Director) has been on the Bay Area music scene for more than four decades as a singer and composer, and director for multi-cultural vocal ensembles. She’s been a featured singer with Terry Riley and Zakir Hussain among other jazz luminaries. Bobby McFerrin

tapped her to run the yearlong audition process for his Voicestra a cappella vocal ensemble after seeing her Jazzmouth ensemble.

Eric Ting (Director and Artistic Director) is an Obie Award-winning director and was appointed Artistic Director of California Shakespeare Theater in November of 2015. Deeply committed throughout his career to the development of new and diverse voices for the theater, Eric has directed plays (many of them world premieres) by Lauren Yee, Sam Hunter, Aditi Kapil, Kimber Lee, Jackie Sibblies Drury, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig, Laura Jacqmin, Kenneth Lin, Kristoffer Diaz, Anna Deavere Smith, Toshi Reagon and many others. He has also been recognized for his co-adaptation of Hemingway's *Old Man & the Sea* and his controversial interpretation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* set during the Vietnam War. His work has been seen at Manhattan Theatre Club, Soho Rep, the Public Theater, Berkeley Rep, ACT, Goodman Theatre, Victory Gardens, Denver Center, Seattle Rep, Williamstown Theatre Festival, A.R.T., Shakespeare Santa Cruz, Hartford Stage, BAM Next Wave, Cincinnati Playhouse and the Alliance Theatre; as well as internationally, including Singapore, France, Canada, Romania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Holland, UAE and Bali. He's proud to call the Bay Area his home with his wife, director and producer Meiyin Wang, and their daughter Frankie.

ABOUT CAL SHAKES

California Shakespeare Theater (Cal Shakes), under the leadership of Artistic Director Eric Ting and Managing Director Susie Falk, is now planning for its 44th season as a nationally-recognized leader in drawing on the power of authentic, inclusive storytelling to create more vibrant communities. Serving more than 43,000 people annually, Cal Shakes invites people from all walks of life to make deeply-felt connections with our shared humanity through its work onstage, in schools, and with people in non-traditional settings throughout the Bay Area who have little or no access to theater. For more information, visit www.calshakes.org.

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Fast Facts about *black odyssey*

WHAT California Shakespeare Theater's limited return engagement of *black odyssey*
by **Marcus Gardley**
directed by **Eric Ting**
vocal composition by **Linda Tillery and Molly Holm**
designed by **Michael Locher** (scenic designer), **Dede M. Ayite** (costume designer),
Xavier Pierce (lighting designer), and **T. Carlis Roberts** (sound designer).
Featuring: **Aldo Billingslea** (Great Grand Paw Sidin), **Velina Brown** (Alesendra Sabine),
Michael Curry (Malachai), **Cleavant Derrick** (Great Grand Daddy Deus), **Santoya Fields**
(Nella Pell), **Safiya Fredricks** (Benevolence Nausicca Sabine), **Margo Hall** (Great Aunt
Tina), **JD Mollison** (Ulysses Lincoln), **Ruthie Price** (drummer), and **Michael Gene
Sullivan** (Artez Sabine)

WHEN September 25-October 5, 2018

Preview September 25 at 8pm
Opening (Marcus Gardley Day) September 26 at 7:30pm
Tuesdays through Thursdays at 7:30pm
Fridays and Saturdays at 8pm
Saturday Matinee October 6 at 2pm
Sunday Matinees at 4pm
Grounds open two hours prior to show time for picnicking. Café and full bar are available on site.

WHERE Bruns Amphitheater, 100 California Shakespeare Theater Way, Orinda, CA 94563
(just off Highway 24 at the California Shakespeare Theater Way/Wilder Rd. exit, one mile east of the Caldecott Tunnel.)

Complimentary shuttle from Orinda BART beginning 2 hours before curtain.
Complimentary parking onsite.

TICKETS Single tickets start at \$20, with discounts available for seniors, students, persons age 30 and under, and groups. Cal Shakes makes twenty tickets available for \$20 on a first-come, first-served basis for every performance throughout the season. Call Cal Shakes' Box Office at 510.548.9666 between noon and 2pm to purchase. Prices subject to change.
All tickets are available through the California Shakespeare Theater Box Office, 701 Heinz Avenue, Berkeley CA, 510.548.9666, online at www.calshakes.org, or at the Bruns box office on the day of the performance (pending availability).

GROUPS Groups of 10 or more save \$10 off the adult single ticket price; complimentary ticket available for groups of 15+. For more information, call 510.809.3290.

INFO www.calshakes.org

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***black odyssey* Special Events**

Pay-What-You-Can Preview, Tuesday, September 25, 7:30pm

The first preview of each show is a special Pay-What-You-Can performance. Tickets are first-come, first-served, and available beginning at 6pm day of show only; to purchase, call the Cal Shakes Box Office at 510.548.9666 or visit the Bruns Amphitheater Box Office.

Marcus Gardley Day & Opening Night Post-Show Party, September 26, following the performance

Experience the excitement of the opening night performance and then mingle with the cast and creative team at a complimentary post-show party.

Grove Talks, 45 minutes before each performance

Free, informal 20-minute talks are held on site 45 minutes before each and every performance in the ADA-accessible Grove Talk grove, offering invaluable insight into the play and the production.

Community Second Line Sunday, September 30, 3:15 pm

Free dance class with live jazz band accompaniment before the show and an audience-inclusive Second Line parade following that day's performance. Choreographer Latanya D. Tigner will familiarize participants with the signature bounce, swag, "fonk", and footwork of the Second Line dance form. As an improvisational movement response to brass band music played during jazz funeral processions, this dance is one of the cornerstones of New Orleans Second Line parading traditions. Bring your white kerchief, energy, and swag! Les bon temps roule!

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